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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Statement submitted by European Women's Lobby, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the fact that the CSW will review the implementation of policies and actions taken to address "women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building", and states the following:

The EWL recognizes that the impact of war and conflict disproportionately affects women and girls and that violence against women is systematic, extreme and widespread in situations of conflict and war. Violence against women is a continuum, a continuous series of physical, verbal and sexual assaults and acts of sexual violence committed by men against women with the explicit aim of hurting, degrading, intimidating and silencing women, taking away their ability to control their life situation and killing women. Violence against women in times of conflict and war is not simply a by-product of war but it is often a strategic tool, a reaffirmation of the:

"(...) historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement." (paragraph 118 of the Beijing Platform for Action).

Some forms of violence against women are particularly acute in situations of conflict and war. The presence and mobilization of armed (soldiers) and civilian (humanitarian) factions contribute to the growth of the use of women as sexual slaves by soldiers and other officials, which increases the demand for the prostitution of women and girls and contributes to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Of all the abuses committed in war or by repressive regimes, rape in particular is inflicted predominantly against women. Rape is never incidental or private. In a war situation rape is often a strategy planned and organized for achieving specific and military objectives (i.e. a weapon of war).

The EWL recognizes the changing nature of modern day armed conflict and war which increasingly encompasses internal border conflicts and international terrorism. This changing nature of armed conflict impacts on the whole of civil society and calls for a diversity of strategies in which the recognition of the need to promote gender equality is a vital component. The EWL notes that while women have been and, in some instances remain, directly implicated in conflict and war, the diversity of women's lives coupled with the common experience they share of male oppression, gives them a legitimate voice to speak out against conflict and war. War promotes and enhances practices and behaviour that are less tolerated in times of peace, legitimating control and oppression of women, with the result that violence against women is normalized in the breakdown of the State of law and order. Violence against women in times of conflict and war is used as a tactic to humiliate, degrade and control the enemy.

Women also get involved in the conflict as combatants, by taking care of extended families in extremely adverse circumstances and by developing coping mechanisms to take over traditionally male occupations and responsibilities which enables them to gain exposure outside the private sphere. Therefore these added skills of women should in a post-conflict society give women the opportunity to participate actively in the process of reconstruction as they may not want to return to the *status quo ante bellum*. This wide range of activities requires a **gender perspective**, such as the reconstruction of civil society, reorganization of police and armed forces,

promotion of human rights, organization of elections, access to and control over resources (e.g. land issues for female head of households) and the setting-up of truth and reconciliation commissions.

Women have been excluded from participating in decision-making on conflict prevention, management and resolution and on post conflict peace building. The continuous absence of women from all decision-making posts, including in the diplomatic corps, leads to situations of conflict and war, as this cannot be separated from women's participation as a prerequisite for peace. Governments have failed to implement the historic UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and, at the level of the European Union (EU), the Resolution adopted by the European Parliament which calls for at least 40% women in all conflict prevention and resolution decision-making posts.

The EWL calls on the UN and the EU to condemn all forms of gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. The EWL calls on the EU in particular within its common defence policy to condemn and sanction European soldiers who engage in any form of gender-based violence while on mission in areas of armed conflict and to provide clear "Regulations and Rules" and "Codes of Conduct" inspired by those issued by the United Nations[1].

The EWL calls on the EU to adopt the UN Plan of Action proposed by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises[2].

Furthermore, the EWL calls on the EU to grant asylum to women fleeing conflict and war by recognising gender-based violence as a legitimate reason within the existing UN Geneva Convention of the Status of Refugees (1951) and to adopt the UN guidelines on "International Protection – Gender Related Persecution within the context of Article 1A(2)"[3].

The EWL calls on all donor countries to place women's human rights at the core of funding policies for reconstruction and development by ensuring that women avail of funds directly to invest in specialised services for the victims of rape and trauma in the wake of gender-based violence perpetrated during the conflict period; to seek redress through the mechanisms of international law in the aftermath of armed conflict; to participate and take leadership in reconstructing community life and to participate in decision-making at local, regional and national levels in line with UN Resolution 1325.

The EWL calls on the UN and the EU to adopt a gender budgeting approach to military expenditure in particular with regards to conflict prevention and in situations of post-conflict resolution and peace-building.

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[1] United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules. Article 101, paragraph 3 of the Charter of the United Nations places an affirmative obligation on staff to uphold the highest standards of integrity. Cited in "Women, Peace and Security", study submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1325, 2002.

[2] See Plan of Action proposed by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee – Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.

[3] UNHCR. Guidelines on International Protection: Gender-Related Persecution within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, HCR/GIP/02/01, 7 May 2002.